



**Herefordshire  
Council**

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# **Evaluation Excavation in advance of a pipe trench, Croft Castle, The Croft Estate. Herefordshire**



**Report prepared by**

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**Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 338**

**Herefordshire Archaeology**  
Conservation and Environmental Planning  
Planning Services

Regeneration Directorate

Herefordshire Council



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# **Evaluation Excavation in advance of a pipe trench, Croft Castle, The Croft Estate. Herefordshire**

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EHE 80015**

**HAR 338**

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**Herefordshire Archaeology** is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, supports the maintenance of the county Sites and Monuments (Historic Environment) Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects. The County Archaeologist is Dr. Keith Ray.

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## **Summary**

*This report has been produced in response to an archaeological project brief supplied by The National Trust, for the archaeological excavation of a 20m length of trench to run across a grassed area to the west of the Stable Block, prior to the installation of pipes for a new biomass boiler system.*

*The area contains a number of drainage / service runs, the routes and depths of which were uncertain. Upon scanning the site for services, it became apparent that the desired line of the new pipe trench coincided with the line of an existing service run. It was therefore agreed that the new pipe trench could be excavated within the pre-existing service trench and would therefore mitigate further damage to the archaeological resource.*

*It was agreed that the width of the existing service trench should be ascertained so two 1m wide trenches were opened by hand in order to do this. As the turf was removed, it became clear that a well preserved cobbled path had been laid over the line of the trench. A test pit was excavated down either side of the cobbled path within both trenches in order to record the underlying stratigraphy.*

*The underlying deposits appeared to be re-deposited natural to a depth in excess of 1m below the present ground surface. No artefacts were recovered and nothing of archaeological significance recorded.*

*On the basis of this information it was agreed that the new pipe trench could be inserted along the eastern side of the cobbled path without causing any archaeological damage. It was agreed that this could be done under the terms of an archaeological watching brief as per the excavation of the rest of the pipe trench.*

**Disclaimer:** It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGR's are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50, and 0.02m at 1:20.

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## **1. Introduction**

This report (EHE 80015) provides an account of a archaeological evaluation excavation prior to the construction of a biomass boiler to provide a sustainable heating source for Croft Castle, Home Farm and the Gardener's Cottage on the Croft Estate.

The report sets out briefly the aims and objectives of the project, describes the location, and provides an outline historical background. The report goes on to describe the results of the excavation, the rationale behind variations to the original brief, and concludes with discussion of the principle findings of the excavation.

## **2. Aims, objectives and methods for the study, including reporting**

The brief supplied by The National Trust required the excavation, by hand, of a trench 20m long, 0.95m deep and 0.38m wide. Upon initial inspection and excavation, it was noted that due to the desired location of the pipe trench, the location of pre-existing services and the presence of a well preserved cobbled path, the pipe trench could be excavated by machine under archaeological supervision without damaging any significant archaeology.

## **3. Location**

The Croft Castle Estate is a National Trust property that has been in its ownership since 1957. The Croft Estate covers approximately 720ha and is located 7km north-west of Leominster in North Herefordshire. The property extends across 5km of the upper slopes of a south-facing hillside, from Bircher Coppice in the east to the River Lugg at Aymestrey in the west. The Croft Castle estate currently straddles the civil parishes of Aymestrey, Lucton and Croft with Yarpole. The Croft Estate is known nationally for the complex and prominent Iron Age hillfort of Croft Ambrey. More locally, the estate is known for its fine, castellated mansion and associated parkland.

### **Geology:**

The solid geology comprises limestones and siltstones of the Silurian series (Earp and Hains, 1971). There are localised colluvial deposits in the dry combes and stream-fed valleys. The bedding planes of the often friable rock are evident in numerous quarries on the property. The soils are of the coarse silts of the Munslow Association (Ragg et al, 1984). Excavations in the vicinity of Croft Castle between 2001 and 2004 demonstrated both the thinness of soil cover over bedrock in many locations and the gleyed nature of the colluvial deposits within the valleys.

#### 4. Background history and previous historical and archaeological works

The name Croft is Old English meaning “the enclosure” (Eckwall, 1960, 131). Aubrey’s *Monumenta Britannica* (c1690), was a largely haphazard compilation of antiquarian notes. He did however visit Herefordshire on a number of occasions, (he owned land within the county), and his comment “*At Crofts-parke is a large Campe with two great Ditches, called the Ambry: from whence (there) is a lovely Prospect*” is no doubt based on first-hand observation, since he is known to have sold his property at Stretford to Bishop Herbert Croft in 1663 (Barber, 1975,20). As such, Aubrey’s mention of the double bank and ditch at Croft Ambrey is one of the first published records of an “archaeological” observation in the county.

Croft was rendered “Crofta” at Domesday, and appears then to have been a relatively small settlement (one plough in lordship, two ploughs and six household heads) in keeping with the compact size of the later parish, Bernard held the land from William of Ecouis, and Edwin was said to have held it in the time of King Edward the Confessor (see Thorn and Thorn, 1983: 14,5).

Very little is well documented about the medieval Croft family, or its estates. Sir Hugh de Croft was named in the list at the tournament at Dunstable in 1308, and was present at the parliament at York in September 1314 (Croft, 1949,22). William of Croft was Sheriff of Herefordshire in 1425 (Croft, 1949, 36). Richard Croft was Sheriff in 1470-1, 1476 and 1485, and in the latter year was also Receiver in the King’s Household (ibid,40). The family was closely allied to the Mortimers of Wigmore and Ludlow and to the house of York. Croft Castle is first mentioned as such among a list of Herefordshire castles in William of Worcester’s *Itineraries*, in 1497 (Goodbury,2000.6.3). The most illustrious family head was Sir James Croft, who, amongst other appointments, was Controller of the Queen’s Household in 1570 (Croft, 1949,56). It was during his lifetime, in 1536, that John Leland mentioned seeing the fortified manor at Croft from a distance. The Inventory of the property of Sir James Croft, produced at the time of his death in 1590, identifies a number of rooms and structures including a hall, a gallery at least one if not two gatehouses and numerous private apartments (Goodbury, 2000, 2002)

Sir William Croft was a prominent Royalist in the early seventeenth century. He was one of the few of the Herefordshire gentry, and the only head of a major household, to have been killed during the Civil War. He was killed in a skirmish at Stokesay in 1645. His younger brother, Herbert Croft became Bishop of Hereford in 1661, having gained a reputation for loyalty to the Royalist cause, for personal bravery and for outspokenness during the years of the Commonwealth.

The Croft family heavily mortgaged the estate in the early years of the eighteenth century. Eventually the mortgages came into possession of both mansion and estate. During the remainder of that century, the Knight and Johnes families were in ownership and occupation. In 1799, Somerset Davies purchased the house, having already acquired significant parts of the estate land. The Davies and later, Kevill-Davies family remained in ownership and occupation throughout the nineteenth century, eventually selling in 1923 to Sir James Croft, the 11<sup>th</sup> Baronet (Goodbury,2000).

### **Statutory constraints:**

The principal statutorily defined and protected area of the estate from an historic environment standpoint is the Scheduled Ancient Monument, Croft Ambrey hillfort (SAM Herefordshire 76). The mansion and St. Michael's church are listed (Grade 1) as buildings of Architectural and Historic Interest. The 18<sup>th</sup> century stable block around a courtyard and the Gothick Wall are also listed (Grade II). The remaining historic environment designation is the inclusion of Croft Castle in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. The park is described as "A landscape park with notable survivals of sweet chestnut plantings of probable C17 date associated with a country house". The Register reference is GD1875. The park is graded II\*.

### **Previous historical and archaeological research**

O.G.S.Croft wrote a history of the Croft family (*The House of Croft of Croft Castle*, E.J. Thurston Press, Hereford, 1949). This included mention of documentary references to the castle and estate, and notes by George Marshall on Croft Church (pp. 129-35). Elizabeth Inglis-Jones published an account of the ownership and occupation of Croft Castle by the Knight and Johnes families (in *Peacocks in Paradise*, Faber, 1950). Diana Uhlmann wrote the Guidebook for the property which was first published in 1979 and was last revised in 1990.

Dr. S. Stanford published privately a report on the Woolhope Naturalist's Field Club sponsored research excavations at Croft Ambrey between 1960 and 1966 (Stanford 1974) Advisory staff of The National Trust reported upon the archaeological and biological conservation issues affecting Croft Ambery in the mid-1980s (Alexander, Claris and Lutley, 1985).

D.M.Young and K.A.Fretwell published historical research on the castle and estate in a volume that arose from a Manpower Services Commission Community Programme project in the mid 1980's, (*Croft Castle Park and Garden Survey, 1986-87*, Fretwell, Knox and Young)

H. Dalwood and R. Waller produced a draft report on an archaeological survey of the whole estate, (*Croft Castle Estate: Survey and archaeological management recommendations, 1992*)

The National Trust has commissioned a series of further studies in recent years, primarily in connection with refurbishment works with the mansion itself between 2000 and 2002. Small scale archaeological watching briefs have been undertaken and reported on which include works on the refurbishment of the Carpenter's Shop as a tea room by Worcester County Archaeology Service and the laying of a new water pipe to supply field troughs by Marches Archaeology.

In 2001-2 Herefordshire Archaeology were commissioned to expand upon the Dalwood and Waller survey report. The entire Estate was re-surveyed and a gazetteer of sites created. (T.Hoverd and K.Ray Herefordshire Archaeology Report 49, 2003)

Herefordshire Archaeology worked in partnership with the National Trust between 2001 and 2004 during which time four seasons of research excavation and fieldwork were undertaken. A series of reports describing these works are in preparation. (T.Hoverd and K.Ray forthcoming).

It is understood that L-P Archaeology undertook fieldwork within the walled garden, aimed at identifying and recording the formal paths during 2012.

During May 2013 a desk-based assessment was undertaken by Herefordshire Archaeology in order to locate a viable route for the pipe runs associated with the proposed installation of a biomass boiler.

## 5 Fieldwork in 2014

Field work took place on the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2014. Prior to excavation, the line of the proposed trench had been laid out with stakes and the line of mains services had been sprayed onto the grass. It was immediately clear that the line of a 19<sup>th</sup> century pipe (accessed through an iron cover) ran on the same axis as the proposed trench. The pipe appeared to be well over a metre below the present ground surface and running on a north south axis.

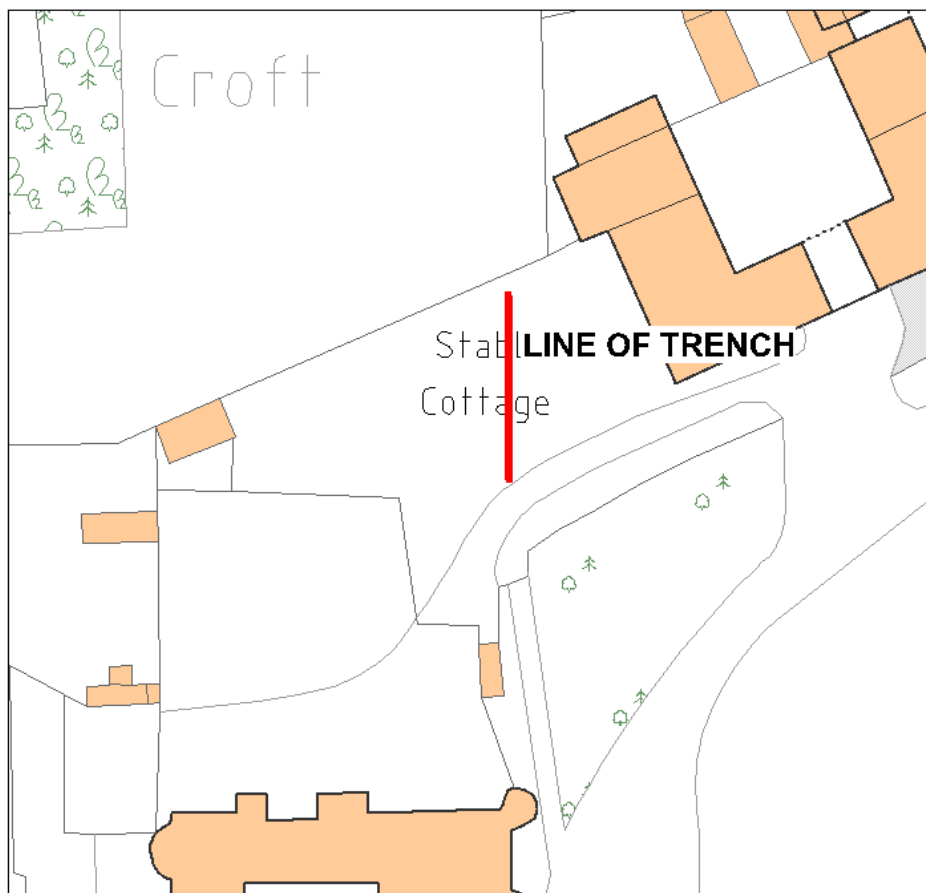


Figure 1: Plan showing the proposed line of the pipe trench.



After discussions with the National Trust's Project Manager it was agreed that the width of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century pipe trench should be revealed in order to confirm that the new heat pipe run could be accommodated within it. A 3m long by 0.75m wide trench was laid out perpendicular to the line of the service trench. Upon the removal of the turf a 1.4m wide, cobbled path was apparent, (Plate 1). This comprised a well laid stone set path with vertical stone kerbing which appeared to run directly between the doorway into the walled / kitchen garden and the cobbled path which leads through the shrubbery to the east front of Croft Castle.

To confirm the presence / survival of the rest of the course of the path a second trench was excavated approximately 8m to the south of trench 1. The location of the second trench was chosen to coincide with the point at which a service drain, (identified by the service scan) runs through or under the likely route of the path. Trench 2 also contained the cobbled path, (Plate 2). In part the stone kerbing had been replaced by brick and brick fragment formed part of the metalled surface of the path. The use of brick coincided with the line of the service drain which runs diagonally on a north-east / south-west axis and suggests that the path was disturbed during the laying of the drain and then re-built using a mixture of bricks, original cobbles and brick fragments.



Plate 1: Trench 1, looking west, showing the cobbled path overlying the 19<sup>th</sup> century pipe trench.



Plate 2: Trench 2 showing the cobbled path overlying the 19<sup>th</sup> century pipe trench. Note the brick within it's construction.

It is understood that the National Trust had planned to construct / re-instate a pathway on the line of the existing cobbled path. It was therefore decided to re-route the new pipe trench so that it ran along one side or other of the existing cobbled path. Test pits were excavated either side of each exposed section of path in order to sample and record the underlying stratigraphy.



Plate 3: Line of trench / path looking south showing the drain inspection lid in the foreground.

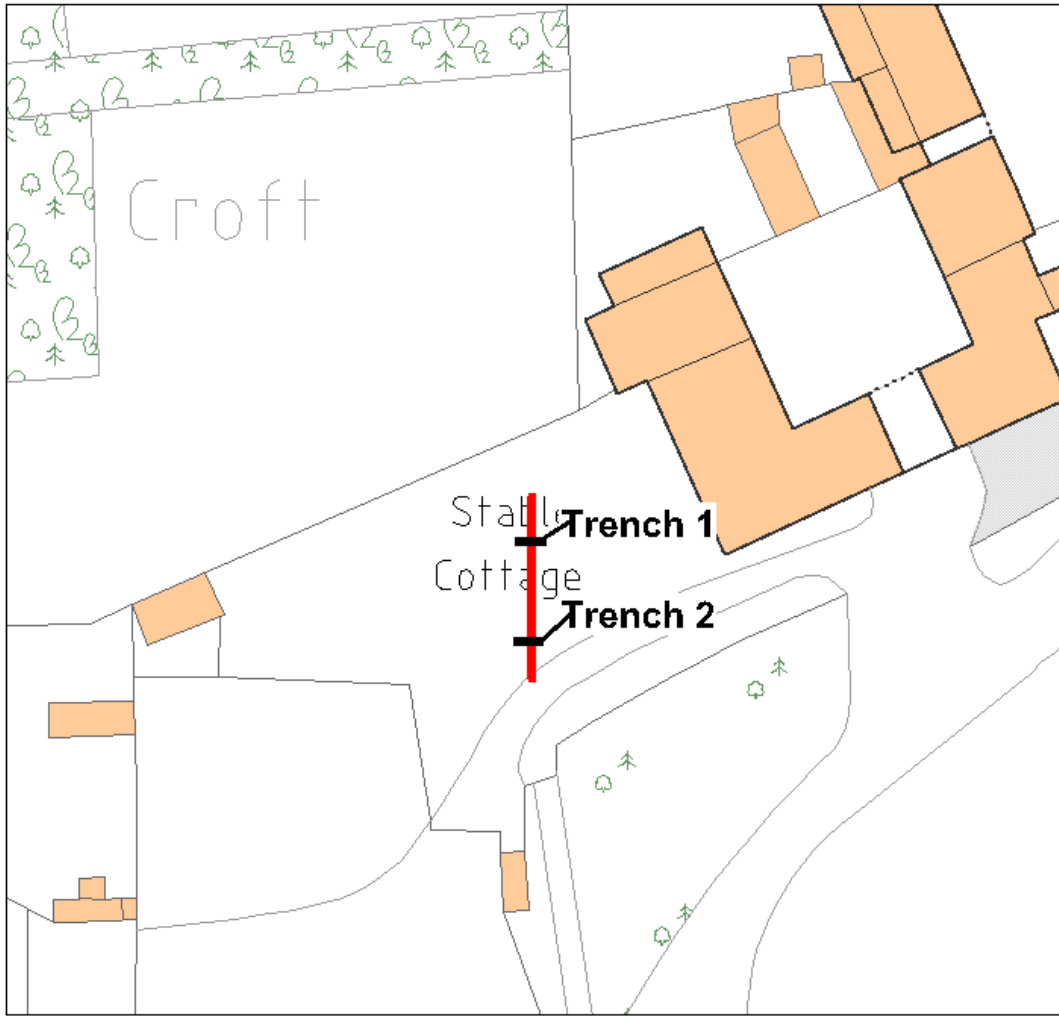


Figure 2: Trench Location Plan



Plate 4: Eastern end of trench 1 showing sondage through re-deposited natural.



Plate 5: West end of Trench 1 showing sondage into natural subsoil.



Plate 6: Eastern sondage within Trench 2, showing re-deposited natural within service trench.

Four sondages were excavated. The sondages at the western ends of Trench 1 and Trench 2, (Plate 5 and Plate 7), contained a 0.25m thick layer of dark, loamy earth containing ash and small stones. It is suggested that this represents a deposit associated with a flower bed. This directly overlay a clay sub-soil which became more compact and stoney with depth.

The sondage within the eastern end of Trench 1, (Plate 4), was excavated to a depth of 1.0m and appears to comprise a very well compacted but re-deposited mix of natural clay and bedrock, containing occasional charcoal fragments. It is suggested that this represents the fill of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century service trench.

The sondage within the eastern end of Trench 2, cut through a similar, re-deposited natural, (Plate 6). This was the compacted fill of the pipe trench which runs on a north-east / south-west axis from Stable Cottage.



Plate 7: The western end of Trench 2, showing sondage into natural subsoil.

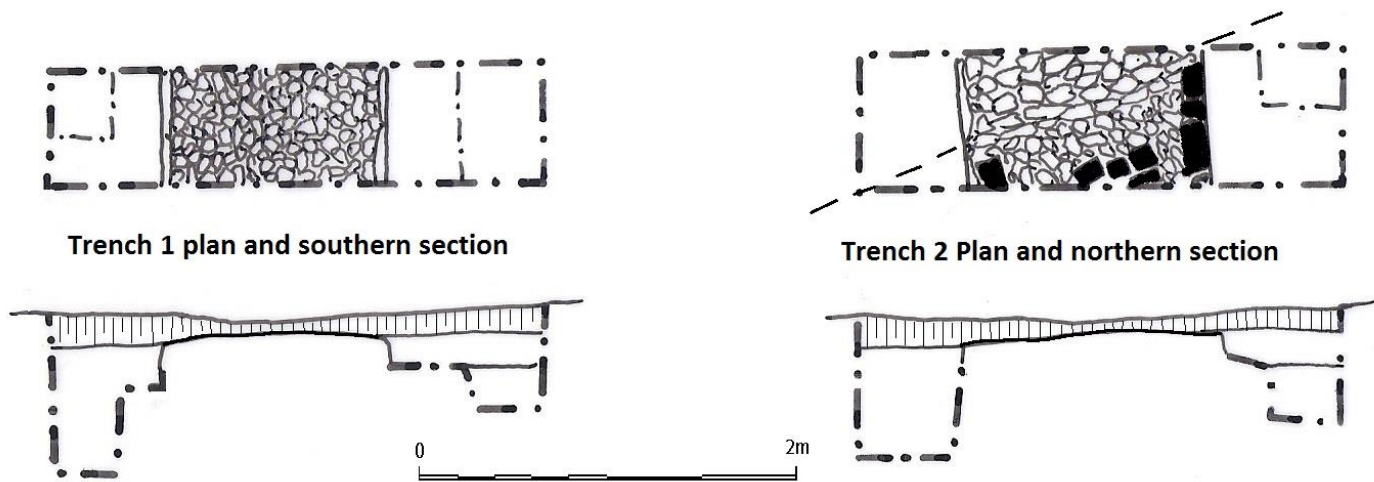


Figure 3: Trench plans and sections over cobbled path. The dashed line on the Trench two plan shows the edge of the north-east / south-west service trench. The black shapes are the locations of bricks used in the resurfacing of the path after this service trench was excavated.

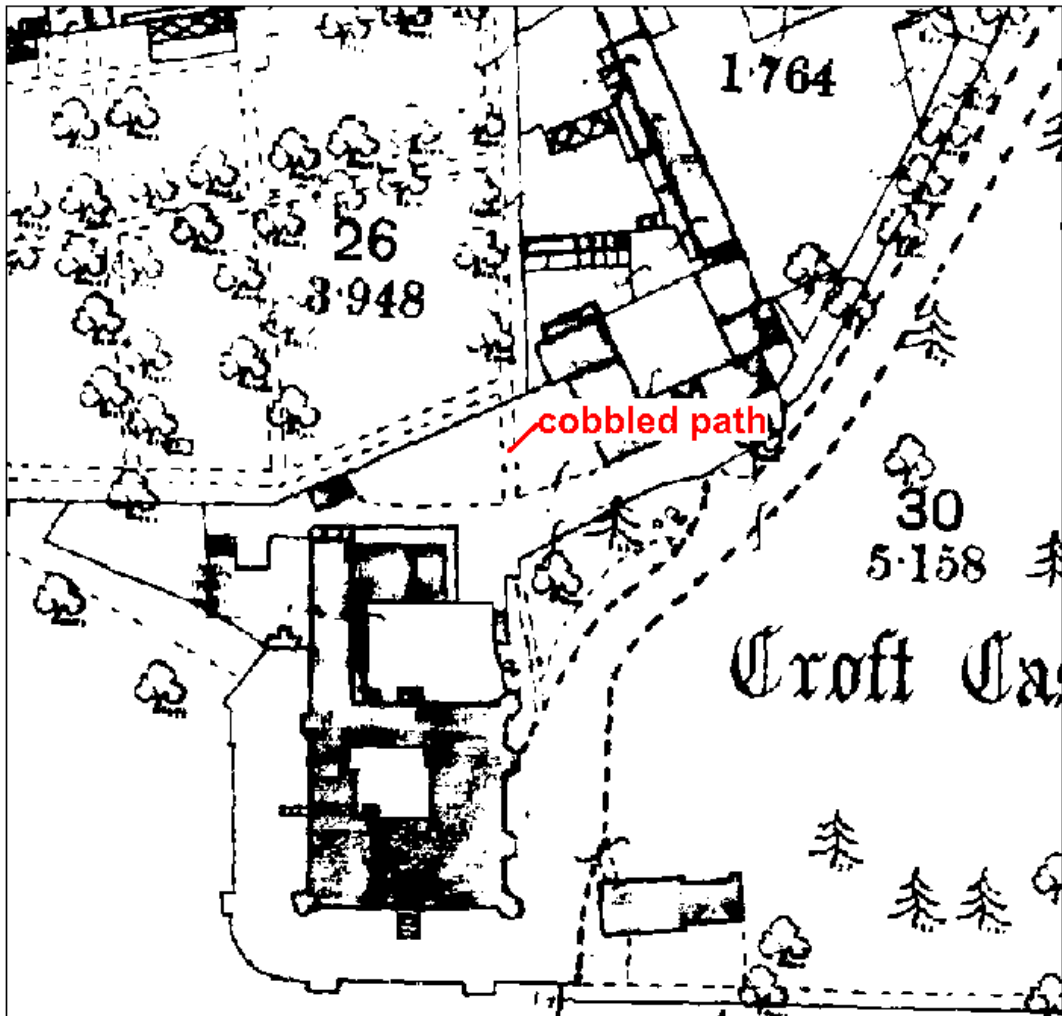


Figure 4: Extract from the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1887

## 6. Conclusions

It is clear that a significant amount of disturbance has occurred along the proposed route of the heat pipe trench within the area studied. The principal disturbance appears to relate to the insertion of a series of drainage runs. The earliest drainage run appears to date from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The brickwork of the inspection chamber and the iron pipe would suggest a Victorian date. This runs almost directly under the line of the cobbled path. A second service run runs from Stable Cottage on a north-east / southwest axis and has cut through the cobbled path (Figure 3). The path has then been re-instated at this point. A path is clearly marked on this location and on the same alignment on the Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Map of 1887, (Figure 4). The sondages excavated within western terminals of Trench 1 and Trench 2 suggest that a shallow flower bed was apparent along this side of the path and that this directly overlay a hard, natural subsoil. The sondage within the eastern terminal of Trench 1 appears to cut through the fill of the north / south pipe trench run, whilst the sondage within the eastern terminal of Trench 2 was excavated within the fill of the pipe

trench aligned north-east / south-west. The fills of both trenches (Figure 3) appear to comprise re-deposited natural clay subsoil and bedrock indicating that little if any archaeological deposits are apparent within this area.

Having considered the information revealed by the fieldwork, in conjunction with the constraints imposed by the desired route of the new heat pipe trench; it was agreed between Herefordshire Archaeology, the Project Manager for the National Trust and the Archaeology Consultant for the National Trust that it would be possible, (and desirable), to route the heat pipe trench along the eastern edge of the cobbled path. It was agreed that due to the disturbed nature of the area and the apparent lack of any significant archaeological deposits, the trench for the heat pipe could be excavated by machine under close archaeological supervision. This would mitigate any damage to the cobbled path which the National Trust could re-use, whilst still achieving the same running meter length of trenching.

## Appendix

### Site Archive:

Project Brief for Archaeological Excavation on installation of a Biomass Boiler and associated infrastructure. November 2013.

12 Context Sheets

2 section Drawings

2 trench plans

16 digital photographs

This document.

### Acknowledgements:

The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Jo Dimitri, Janine Young and Ian Grafton of the National Trust for their assistance and co-operation with the production of this report. He would also like to thank Peter Dorling for his help with the fieldwork.

### List of Illustrations:

Figure 1: Plan showing the proposed line of the pipe trench.

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Plate 5: West end of Trench 1 showing sondage into natural subsoil.

Plate 6: Eastern sondage within Trench 2, showing re-deposited natural within service trench.

Plate 7: The western end of Trench 2, showing a sondage into natural subsoil.

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